This Umbilical Residue

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This Umbilical Residue

by willowoftheriver

Summary

Only a few months after returning from Japan, Will is still adjusting to the abrupt changes Mount Hikami left in its wake when she's asked to investigate a series of copycat murders centered in rural Toluca County, Maine.

And though every place has its secrets, some are much darker than others.

Notes

Will, Hannibal, and company are going to be subjected to every survival horror game there is by the time this series is done. I should've ditched the faux-poetic bullshit and just called this series "YOU HAVE ONCE AGAIN ENTERED THE WORLD OF SURVIVAL HORROR"

my beloved monster and me

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You don't have to do this if you're not up to it," is what Jack opens with.

That certainly bodes well.

Still, Jack is also staring at her with that same highly wary, faintly disappointed look he's aimed at her ever since they came back from Japan. So she holds out her hand for the case file.

"I'm fine," she says, and makes brief, skittering eye contact over the rim of her glasses. It's only become a little bit easier to do since coming back. (Except now, pretty much everybody who knows doesn't *want* to meet her eyes.)

"Are you sure?"

"It's not like I'm busy," she says with a light, little deprecating laugh, but Jack's expression just pinches in on itself. She squirms slightly, because *of course* he would already think she has nothing to do. *You hit the jackpot*, Beverly had said soon after they got back, and she hadn't meant anything by it, but she'd still inadvertently hit the nail on the head.

Hannibal is wealthy; it's obvious. He peacocks around in bespoke suits to *make sure* it's obvious. He's also much older than her, and to the outside looking in, they don't seem to have anything in common except perhaps a shared interest in forensic psychology they approach in drastically different ways.

And what happened on Mount Hikami is unexplainable to anyone who hadn't been there. Jack, Price, and Zeller, occasionally even Beverly—they look at her and she just gets this sense of, of *spooked confusion*, because they don't even entirely understand everything they saw.

So suddenly Will is 'engaged', with no fanfare, to a wealthy older man, wearing her own bespoke outfits and a ring that's subtle, yes, but still looks far too expensive. The confusion had been the first reaction, and Will understood it—she knows Hannibal is more attractive than her, more successful than her. *Why would he ever . . .?*

But now, they've managed to come up with an answer. Will's not showing yet, but she can't bear the smell of coffee, and even autopsies she could've previously withstood with hardly a flinch have her rushing to the bathroom with her gorge rising, all because of the smell. She was pale, then she was glowing, and now the general consensus has become that little, demented Will Graham is more of a schemer than anyone had ever imagined. Caught herself a man, as her old Aunt Naomi might say.

(Will tries not to care. But how can she, when the thoughts *find* her, burrow into her head however much she fights them?)

"Ever been to Maine?" Jack asks.

"*Maine*? No." She'd been north with her father as a child, but not quite that east.

"There were a series of killings up there about fifteen years back, in a rural county—Toluca. Encompasses about five small towns and a whole lot of nothing. They caught the guy after he'd killed ten, but he never went to trial—committed suicide in his room at a psychiatric hospital before he was even arraigned. And that's that, right?"

"I'm guessing not."

"The murders all had a distinctive signature, a series of numbers the guy carved into the victims' bodies."

"What did they mean?"

"No one was able to determine that. But now, more bodies are turning up with the same type of numbers. There's been two so far, and the LEOs up there are thinking they've got a copycat."

"Or the original had a partner . . ."

"That's for you to determine."

Jack offers her the file, but doesn't let go of it until she meets his eyes. "Take care of yourself," he says, in a tone of voice ridiculously reminiscent of her father.

If Will were nastier, or pettier, she could say the same back to him. Hannibal had him and Bella to dinner just the other night, and it seems like Jack's wife has been decaying away inversely to how Will's belly has grown. She can taste his grief, a specter on the edge of her mind.

(How bitter would he be, to know the Ripper's so happy?)

But Will would never do any of that. She really just wishes he'd feel better, even though she can't give him the one thing he really wants from her. And she's honestly appreciative, if not grateful, for his concern, however much it might rub a little the wrong way.

"I will," she assures him. She tugs the file out of his hands and presses it tight against her chest, giving him a little, unconvincing smile.

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Hannibal's house . . . her house (though she really can't think of it that way yet, if probably ever) . . . is currently a mess of boxes, clutter, and dogs. It's certainly big enough, but apparently Will hadn't realized just how much furniture and general *stuff* she had. That's not even to mention that the dogs came with their own beds and toys, and the backyard is still in the process of being fenced in.

Hannibal's still at his office, by this time in session with Mason Verger.

Will hates Mason, in a very unique kind of way she's rarely experienced before. She met him once a little while ago when Hannibal invited him and his sister Margot to dinner. Margot was pleasant and Will quickly came to ~~pity~~ like her, but Mason was worms in her mind, squirming in mud and castoff scraps of rotting meat.

(It makes a part of her wonder. Hannibal's a lot of sadistic, disgusting things, but he's not a rapist, certainly not a pedophile. He never would've *fucked his sister*. Just exactly how much does someone have to offend his sensibilities before he finally—?)

But she doesn't really want to consider that now. Instead, she sits down on one of Hannibal's expensive tufted couches between two dogs that are shedding all over it, having put one of the discs from the file Jack gave her in the dvd player. She picks up the remote from the coffee table and presses play.

The footage is grainy, Hannibal's ridiculously large flatscreen enhancing every fault of the old camera used to originally record it. Two people sit at a yellowed Formica table across from each other in a featureless gray room with barred windows and a dingy tile floor.

"Hello, Walter," says one of them, a doctor—a psychiatrist. Will had been around enough of them in her youth to recognize one. It's why she hadn't liked Hannibal in the beginning.

But she can't help but feel a little for this one, sitting across from a man with filthy blond hair and dead pits for eyes. He doesn't respond to the greeting, just keeps smiling vacantly.

"I know you didn't want to talk much yesterday," the doctor continues, falsely pleasant.

And he still apparently hadn't wanted to the next one, given his complete lack of affect and acknowledgement. His green eyes have glazed over from a complete absence of blinking.

Will looks down at the file in her hands. *Sullivan, Walter*, is the title written across the front, and the inside is overflowing with incident reports and crime scene photographs.

Suspect was arrested on the 18th following the issue of a warrant in the homicides of William and Miriam Locane. Suspect resisted arrest, appearing to be psychotic, and was subsequently transferred to the psychiatric ward of Alchemilla Hospital in Silent Hill for evaluation. Suspect was further charged with the homicides of James Stone, Robert Randolph, Sein Martin, Steven Garland, Rick Albert, George Rosten, William Gregory, and Eric Walsh, all committed in the previous two weeks within Toluca County jurisdiction.

"But I thought maybe you might've changed your mind after a night to think about it. You're an intelligent man," the psychiatrist says, tapping a pen against the clipboard in his hands.

“Your score on the M-CAT was very impressive. You surely would’ve excelled in medical school. Did you want to help people, Walter? You were an orphan. That’s only a natural inclination to develop.”

No consistent modus operandi of the crimes, reads a forensic profile from the time, done by Will’s own division, though no one she personally knows. One of Hotchner’s group, maybe. *However, each scene shows strong ritualistic elements, the consistent signature of the numbers carved into the victims’ flesh and the removal of the victims’ hearts postmortem, as well as the unnecessary suturing of the chest wound. May be a sign of remorse.*

No. No remorse. Walter Sullivan thought he was doing something very, *very* right.

“Why Billy and Miriam?” asks the psychiatrist. “The only two children . . . Did you see something of yourself in them?”

Will finds the picture of what was left of Miriam Locane, her skull caved in with the blunt side of an ax, brain matter clinging to bone fragments. A few limbs and fingers lay a ways away from her torso with its sewed up incision between her undeveloped breasts and the number slashed from hip to hip, *08121*.

(She and her brother were only a few feet from their house. Their father came out to check on them before any of the blood had even begun to dry. If only he’d heard the screams.)

Walter finally does blink, though very slowly. “It was the will of God,” he says, with a voice raspy from disuse. His eerie smile never falters.

The doctor seems startled to have actually gotten an answer. “God? Are you relig—”

The taste of blood in his mouth stops him short, his hand flying to his face. He cups his nose, squeezes it shut, but the red keeps flowing, seeping down over his wrist and onto the table.

“Ex-excuse me,” he mutters, standing up. The tape cuts out.

Will looks back to the file, eyes drawn to a different set of photos.

Steven Garland, 63, victim. Proprietor of Garland’s Pet Shop in South Ashfield, Toluca County, Maine. Discovered shot to death in place of business, heart removed, chest wound sutured. Numbers carved in back postmortem, ‘04121’. Shop was vandalized presumably following or during the course of homicide, animals found deceased.

The puppies and the kittens, even some birds and guinea pigs and rabbits, all dead in their cages with nowhere to run. Her eyes burn until she can’t stand to look at it anymore and she slams the file shut, angrily wiping away the wetness on her face.

Winston looks up at her from where he’s curled at her feet. He’s always been so in tune with her. Maybe it’s because he was wearing a rope when she found him that clearly meant he belonged to someone, but it was ragged and too tight and screamed neglect, so she never once bothered to try to find his original owners.

“Want to go for a walk?” she asks him, voice thick.

He shoots up, the location of the front door already memorized.

It takes a while for her to get all seven of them leashed, and none of them like it given they're used to running free. They can't do that in his neighborhood, though.

Baltimore is, by no means, a safe place to go walking, especially given it's dusk, but this is one of its most exclusive neighborhoods, far from the center of the city—Hannibal wouldn't have settled for anything less. A man who once lived more or less down the street from Versailles wouldn't. (He's so fucking pretentious, in a way her father will utterly despise when they meet. That's going to be a *fun* day.)

Having seven dogs probably breaks some kind of local ordinance, but no one's said anything. She hasn't even really met the neighbors, save some perfunctory smiles and waves if they happen to pass on the street. This isn't the kind of street where people come over with baked goods the first day someone moves in, and that's perfectly fine by Will.

The leashes tangle and the dogs nearly trip over each other as they make their way slowly down the sidewalk. Will's not in any hurry, though. The fresh night air's good for her stomach, even though most of her nausea has started to taper off in the last week or so.

(Not that it was ever *that* bad to begin with. Hannibal's little girl *consumes*, just like her father—greedily sucks up everything Will's body has to offer.)

The dogs yap happily when they see the pristinely-kept Afghan Hound that belongs to the house on the corner of the street. It ignores them as it always does, its beautiful black coat gleaming as it retreats up to the front porch with its tail held at stiff attention.

Across the intersection, elementary-aged kids play in their yards, shrieking and laughing as they chase each other. Expensive toys that'll be gathered into the garage at the end of the evening so as to not impact the aesthetic of the street sit forgotten as they throw a ball at each other.

(Sullivan stood about this far away and watched little Billy and Miriam play. Run off to your mother, you ungrateful little brats, run, run, run . . .)

The dogs lead her on, tugging at their unfamiliar leashes, all of them bursting with energy after a day spent in the house. Winston's seemed for a while like he's really enamored of that Afghan Hound, aloof as it is. It makes Will smile, but unfortunately it seems entirely onesided and just not meant to be. Not to mention Winston's neutered.

She tugs gently at his collar until he finally rips his gaze away (not that she doesn't get it—that Afghan's coat really is amazing; it *shimmers*) and on they go. Lights burn in windows, some so exposed they don't even have blinds, much less curtains. How *confident* all her new neighbors are, *ignorant*—Hannibal's crouched and watched prey through windows like that long before he's ever even gone in for the kill. So has that family annihilator with the horrible teeth. (*Oh, he* loves *to watch, and watchwatchwatchwatch—~~they all seem so much realer when they're~~—*)

Not Sullivan, though.

Sullivan watched Billy and Miriam, oh yes he did, but the others—something spiteful and determined rises in her, *focused* and entirely purposeful, but it only comes high enough to settle in her belly.

Hannibal's child in her uterus has been like a breathing thing to her nearly since the instant it was created there, already with its own agency and presence, but now something—*Sullivan* creeps up beneath her, breath hot and wet on her thighs. But he doesn't want her cunt, not at all; there's none of the base, carnal lust that drives Hannibal to seek out that spot over and over again with his mouth and fingers and cock.

Sullivan just wants to go back to the last, the *only*, place anyone is ever truly peaceful.

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Hannibal's car is in the driveway by the time she gets back. She enters the house to the smell of dinner cooking and stops in the foyer to let all the dogs off leash. They all flail around and lick her hands before they finally run off.

"No, no," Hannibal's saying by the time she finds her way to the kitchen, his back very rigid as he stares unblinkingly into Buster's eyes. "*Sit*."

The dog does immediately as he's told. (All animals recognize a predator.)

"Good boy," says Hannibal, reaching down to give him a little bite of something. Buster's behind wiggles across the floor as he takes it.

"What's for dinner?" she asks.

Hannibal gives Buster a final scratch behind his ears before he looks up and smiles at her. "Chicken breast."

Will's eyes go automatically to the skillet, and she's surprised to find that it does, actually, seem to be chicken.

(It was reported in the news, just a little while after they got back from Japan, that the Ripper went on a spree. No sounders this time—just corpses and corpses, all elaborately displayed and hollowed out and stuffed with roses and lilies and baby's breath. A presentation. A piece of art sewn in bone and rotting skin. A gift. The acknowledgement of something monumental.

"What does it mean, Will?" Jack had asked her, and she'd answered as she always knew she would.

"The Ripper's celebrating."

"Celebrating *what*?"

Fatherhood. But she didn't say that. She didn't say anything. In fact, the next time she opened her mouth was to eat the liver Hannibal fed her. Then the kidneys, the lungs, everything else.

("Heart is iron rich," he'd whispered, brushing hair back from her neck to kiss his way up it. His lips eventually lingered on the side of her jaw, focusing on that little motion it made as she chewed. "And you'll be making so much more blood soon . . .")

It never made her puke. And she thinks that that disturbs her more than anything.)

Hannibal pulls her close and kisses her, one arm threading possessively behind her back. The other rests a hand on her stomach, rubbing shallow circles. "How are you? Any nausea?"

She shakes her head, kisses him back. It should feel risky letting her tongue slip into his mouth, but it doesn't. "She's settled down."

His smile grows wider against her lips. "You're so sure it's a girl."

"It is. Are you disappointed? Want a Hannibal the ninth?"

"Not at all. Not yet. Have you started thinking of names yet?"

Certainly not Mischa. It's too *visceral*. "I've, uh, I've been thinking about my stepmother's. I've always liked her." A hell of a lot more than her own mother. Will dearly hopes her daughter will never love a stranger more than her, even though there are so many reasons she very well might. "*Marguerite*."

"French," he sighs into her mouth. "A pearl."

His hands settle heavily on her hips. Warmth spreads down from them through her lower stomach, but she slips out of his grasp. "The chicken'll burn."

Hannibal's obsession with cooking is about neck in neck now with the desire that seems to only grow more and more each time he has her, rather than ever being sated. But he manages to drag himself away before dinner's wasted.

(Because that would truly be the *worst* thing, wouldn't it? To *waste*?)

The chicken's quickly served up onto fine china plates, paired with vegetables and drizzled with a sauce. He ushers her into the dining room and pours a white wine for himself that he sips as he stares at her across the ridiculously long table.

"Uncle Jack gave you a case," he says. Will hates how easily he can read her, though then again, at least it's not *supernatural.* Truly, it makes his accuracy all the more impressive—he's really the talented one between them. She's just . . . whatever it is she is.

"You ever been to Maine?" she asks.

"No."

“Neither have I.” She chews her perfectly seasoned chicken, lets her mind briefly wander to that horrible place that considers whether the baby absorbs as many nutrients from animals as she does from humans. “There was a serial killer there back in the nineties, in this rural county. A, uh, an omnivore, really. Killed all sorts. Took their hearts and sewed them back up.”

“An aspiring surgeon.”

“Yeah. He butchered them all, there wasn’t any care about how he got it done . . . but then he goes to the trouble of closing the incisions in their chests. And *competently*, I think. But you should take a look at it.”

“Did he have any legitimate medical experience?”

“Not exactly, but he’d gotten into medical school right before he was arrested.”

“And what did he do with all these hearts?”

Will tries to concentrate, reach out towards Sullivan with that sensory part of her mind she doesn’t really understand. But nothing comes. “I don’t know. They were never found, even though there were ten of them taken.”

Did he eat them?

Hannibal definitely thinks it, even though he doesn’t—*quite*—ask. She sees the question in the curve of his lips, the bloody tint of his irises. And Will remembers the taste of that heart on her tongue, rich and tinged with iron and olive oil and so tender because it had been torn from chest of a live man like some kind of ancient sacrifice, a ritual offering to her unborn child.

But no—this isn’t Hannibal, and it isn’t Garret Hobbs. It’s something else, and it makes her squirm uncomfortably at the base of her spine.

“I think he wanted something he couldn’t have,” she mutters. “And that’s why—it’s why I don’t get why the murders have started up again. He’s dead—he killed himself in his cell. With a soup spoon. There’s something that just seemed so . . . *personal* about all of it. It *should*’ve died with him.”

“Yet it didn’t. How many new victims have there been?”

“Two. But their hearts weren’t taken.”

“A sloppy copycat. Unless that detail was never made public?”

“No, it was.”

“Why do they even believe them to be related in the first place?”

“He left this series of numbers on them, that was the second part of the signature. No one’s been able to figure out what it means, but it’s reappeared on these two.”

“Were the numbers made public as well?”

“Yes—they caught him pretty quickly. It’s not like he made any effort to hide that it was him. He even carved his name on one of the bodies. It was more just catching up to him than an actual investigation. So the police didn’t feel much need to withhold many details as they already had their guy.”

“How prudent.” Hannibal’s far too well bred to roll his eyes, but she would guess that’s the only thing holding him back. “Was there ever any evidence he had an accomplice at the time?”

“No. I don’t think he was even organized enough to have been able to work with anyone else.”

(But there *is* still an order to it, isn’t there? Those numbers sitting there beneath all that chaos . . .)

“What do you think he was trying to say, Will?” His voice is a little soft, almost sweet, the same way it always is when he asks her about another killer. Coaxing her in the right direction like no one else can.

It was the will of God. But Will doesn’t know what that means, not applied to this. A larger purpose . . . but Sullivan is carved into every inch of this just as much as any of those numbers, something *so* intimate about it. Not sexual, though. Purer.

She shakes her head. “I—I don’t know. I *don’t know*. But he—I think he was . . . *working* towards something.” She doesn’t know why she thinks that, why it seems right. It just *does*.

And it *twinges*, deep in her womb, so much that she fights the urge to curl around her abdomen protectively. She feels a little like Leda in that godawful painting hanging on the wall across the room *that’s very definitely coming down before the baby is born*, cringing away from something staring up inside her.

It gulls her in an extremely petty way that Hannibal has another drink after dinner as they sit in the family room on a plush leather couch. The amber liquid in the tumbler calls to her like a siren, more seductive than ever simply because she can’t have it, and he *damn well knows* she’s just as much of a drinker as he is—more of one.

She decides to very purposefully busy herself unpacking a box, sparing a few pats to Winston’s head where he sits at her feet. Though, while she might be ignoring him a little, Hannibal isn’t her, his eyes very much following every pointless item she unpacks. It’s a bunch of books in this one, novels she never got around to reading and likely never will, and a few old college textbooks on criminology and forensic psychology. Why does she even still have them? *Reference*, just in case?

Maybe she sees some value in her degree for giving her a professional measuring stick (or just so that she doesn’t have to conclude that she wasted so *much* of her time), but it's not like she’ll ever really need it in the conventional way. She even knew that to some degree or another back then, even though she’d lacked any true understanding of herself.

Hannibal leans over and kisses her all of a sudden, his saliva rich with brandy. It's not enough for her to feel any of the pleasant effects, but his kisses have always released something that's otherwise tight in her chest, made her melt against him, boneless and very nearly defenseless.

"Whatever did he do with those hearts?" he murmurs against her lips before he trails his mouth down to her breasts. After a second, he pulls her shirt up and off her arms as she obligingly lifts them, then pauses for half a second as he listens to her heartbeat, ear pressed against the edge of her bra in the middle of her chest. "What did he want?"

And Will doesn't know, *she doesn't know*, but her brain slips from image to image like a dream and his words come back to her. *She'll be making so much more blood for the baby.*

Of course, there'll be no prenatal vitamins for her. Only hideous, bloody offerings, given to her like presentations before a god.

He's unhooked her bra and slipped it off, and now he's licking and biting and *sucking* at each of her nipples in turn, but her colostrum hasn't come in yet and she can't do the one last thing he wants from her, to *feed* him.

Later, though . . . later, yes, yes, he'll take from her, suck her milk dry, nourish himself like he never has from meat alone. (And just the thought of it makes her so *wet*—he's spent so long killing and eating, even before she was born, but it's only now that he'll finally be fulfilled.)

(Fulfilled like Sullivan never was.)

He divests them of the rest of their clothes so smoothly she hardly notices, too wrapped up in his hand between her legs, then his mouth. Eating and eating and it could *so easily* become literal but she can only throw her head back against the armrest of the couch and let him do it, press her fingers hard into his skull to encourage him on.

She manages to spare the thought that she hopes Winston left the room before her mind whites out entirely.

He presses smirking kisses against her inner thighs as she gasps, trying to get her breathing back under control. His hands trace upwards, teasing across her oversensitive clit before settling over her abdomen, bleeding warmth into her skin. The fetus is really still an embryo at this point, hardly anything at all. It could fall out of her in a gush of blood without any warning, but Will's confident it won't, because she *feels* a lifetime stretching out from her, the soup of a brain contained inside her with infinitely forming synapses poised to inform an entire being. (Oh, how Will hates the things that are going to go into her daughter's brain, sooner or later . . .)

His hands move back up to her breasts, his lips to her mouth. He eases his way inside her, gentle, gentle. He won't risk rattling the fragile teacup, as much as he might crave to cut off one of her fingers and chew it up whole, crunching the bones and meat together in his mouth. No cooking necessary—she'd surely be amazing raw.

The baby, though—that's nothing to be consumed. It's the one thing inverse to everything else he's ever done, the one thing he's *created*. And he'll preserve it.

He desperately wants to take her viciously, though, even more so than he did the first time. He's already slammed himself in so far she'll never be able to get him out, but that was largely about guilt and regret, self punishment—now he wants gratification, a reaffirmation thrumming with an undercurrent of possession. And self control has truly never been Hannibal's best trait, however much he's cultivated it.

He still tries to maintain a pace that's gentle enough, restrained. He's careful to prop his weight up on his arms rather than let it rest on top of her, and his kisses are sweet, tinged through with iron.

Though their hips do eventually press flush, his cock going deeper and deeper with each thrust until it's as far as it can go, so far that it brushes her cervix.

(Almost like a fist knocking on an apartment door.)

Chapter End Notes

Nah, this isn't going to take place during the ultra-fun third round of the murder spree, just the second one. But what better game to provide infinite pregnancy/motherhood metaphors and parallels and stuff?

I never liked the Silent Hill movies, so this is firmly in the game canon. The timeline of this whole series is off, but I'm going to say this takes place sometime before the events of SH3.

I don't expect this to be anywhere near as long as the first one, and I'm already planning heavily for the next one, so it's kind of an interquel. You might be able to guess who "Marguerite" is (I didn't make her up; she's a canonical character from another series) but that'll be much more expanded upon later.

Story title is from the song "Orestes" by A Perfect Circle, and the series title is from "Woke Up This Morning" by Alabama 3. The chapter title is from "My Beloved Monster" by the Eels.

Oh, and "Every town has its secrets. Some are just darker than others." was the tagline of the first Silent Hill.

I don't believe that Walter was ever canonically mentioned to be a medical student/applying to medical school, just a college student, but I seem to remember that it was a fairly popular theory/headcanon due to the nature of what he did.

(And speaking of headcanons, I'm calling it now: No, Walter is notttttttt circumcised.)

in all chaos, there is calculation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will doesn't understand that she's awake when she finds herself staring at the ceiling. One of her arms has slid out from beneath the sheets and comforter without her noticing and her hand is reaching for it, straining at the wrist. It seems like her fingers are already brushing it but it's just a cruel illusion, holding its warmth far out of reach. And she's so *cold*.

"Will," says Hannibal.

She blinks, and suddenly he's there, standing at the side of the bed. His hands work to get his tie into the proper knot, but his eyes are on her, rusty in the dim light of the room.

"Are you dreaming?" he asks.

She lowers her arm as pain from her muscles slowly creeps into her consciousness. "No . . . no, I'm awake."

"Where are you?"

"Your . . . our bedroom. It's . . ." She glances at the clock on the nightstand, squinting at the bright digital numbers. "6:28 in the morning. My name is Will Graham."

She's not cold anymore. And the ceiling is just a ceiling. In fact, the only thought that stands out at all in her sluggish mind as she speaks is that she really could already use his surname, whatever the legal paperwork says, and that she likes the notion of getting rid of her mother's name that had been such a point of dispute in her childhood.

She's not sure what she was even doing before.

"Go back to sleep," he tells her, leaning down to press a featherlight kiss to her lips.

She still has a while before she absolutely has to wake up, her first class starting at 10:30. A few weeks ago, she would've gotten up with him so they could eat breakfast together, but fatigue has been steadily increasing the further along the pregnancy progresses.

"Good morning," she mumbles, voice slurring with the sleep that's already closing back in on her mind. Her awareness is fading out just as quickly as it came. "Have a . . . have a good day at, uh, at . . ."

She trails off into a peaceful void that isn't broken by anything—no stray thoughts or images, none of the horrors coiled just beneath her pillow, no replaying memories or abstract, distorted fears—until the alarm loudly brings her out of it. She groans in disgust, so reluctant to leave Hannibal's ridiculously soft bed she thinks about calling in to say she's sick, but it's October and midterms are fast approaching, with all that entails.

So, she begins her new morning routine:

First she staggers to the bathroom, then the closet. She stares for a while at the clothes with a furrowed brow. Fashion of any kind has never been a natural inclination for her. Hannibal's gleefully gotten her what almost amounts to an entirely new wardrobe, but she has no idea what to do with it.

Finally, she decides on something she deems as business casual and steps out of the bedroom, where the dogs greet her near-hysterically. However much she'd insisted they wouldn't get on the bed and that the sound of their breathing and snuffling helped her sleep, Hannibal had refused to let them in the room. She hadn't been happy, but she'd backed down, as she had to concede that he'd been fairly tolerant about them running the rest of the house, which is really unexpected enough.

They follow her in a pack down to breakfast. She picks up a bag of coffee grounds and chances a sniff, but no, the scent still makes her stomach turn just as much as it did. A plate of food that's ridiculously more complex than bacon and eggs has been left for her that she microwaves, and as she waits for it, she picks up the Sullivan file sitting there very obviously on the kitchen table.

Unprofessional, though not entirely sloppy, Hannibal's written beside the autopsy reports and pictures of the corpses of the two high school students, Sein Martin and Robert Randolph. *The suturing is clearly amateur, though the excisions show some anatomical knowledge.*

Will skims the details on the next page.

Jasper Gein (18), a schoolmate of Martin and Randolph at Daniel Bryant High School, stated that on the night of the 4th, at approximately 11:30 PM, he and Randolph traveled together to an appointed meeting place on the campus of Pleasant River University, where they were joined by Martin.

They were then approached by the unknown subject, described by Gein as a white male, approximately 18 – 25 years of age, 6'0 – 6'3, 180 – 200 lbs, clean shaven with blond hair. Gein did not know the name of this individual, though states that he was a new acquaintance of Martin's. Gein does not know how they met, but states that he, Martin, and Randolph have a shared interest in "occult stuff" and that Martin believed the unknown subject could tell them more about it and "show them the Devil", possibly due to the subject's rumored or claimed involvement with a religious group in Silent Hill.

Gein states that the unknown subject spoke "gently" and asked them to come with him, but that he was unnerved and refused to go, prompting the subject to unsuccessfully attempt to coax Gein along. Martin and Randolph did accompany the subject, which is the last time Gein saw them alive.

Some faint remnant of leftover panic blooms sourly in Will's chest, the blind animal instinct that saved Jasper Gein's life. Though she's surprised that it did—Sullivan ambushed the Locanes, and his entire spree was just so *erratic* that she hadn't thought he'd be so restrained as to lure. But that's just the thing, isn't it? It's s*o* erratic it's hard to find any pattern. There was only the one female, yes, little Miriam, but aside from that, age and race didn't seem to

matter to him at all, and the methods were so wildly varying she can recite them in her head like some demented mnemonic device she learned in middle school about Henry VIII's wives.

Shot, strangled, strangled, shot, bludgeoned, bludgeoned, axed, axed, stabbed, shot.

And though Hannibal himself tends to enjoy *creative* methods, that in and of itself is consistent in a way this isn't.

Before she sits down to eat, she spreads photos of each crime scene across the kitchen table in roughly chronological order, the best they could determine at the time, with one from Sullivan's own suicide right next to her plate. She studies it as she chews, the corpse lying there half-splayed against the hospital room's gray wall, drenched in arterial blood. There's no spray, no spatter, which means it *seeped*, it was *slow*. Sullivan pushed the dull, round edge of that soupspoon into his carotid millimeter by millimeter and sat there waiting to die. Patient. Determined.

Unafraid.

The rest of them, though—their fear unfolds in her mind one after the other until she's so seized up with horror she lowers her fork, her appetite gone. But then her eyes hit one photo in particular and it's replaced by Jimmy Stone's blank shock and a single, foreign thought. The last one he ever had. *Oh*.

She picks the picture up and frowns at it. Stone was shot in the face at near point blank range, which left the back of his head an unfortunately gory mess.

He was an early victim, judging by the state of decomposition, but he hadn't been found for several days because, quote, "the body was discovered in the basement of Wish House Orphanage, located at 9243 Old County Road. The children stated that they had noticed Stone's absence but nothing else out of the ordinary. Their caretaker George Rosten eventually discovered the body."

George Rosten, the man who was beaten to death in nearly the same spot in the basement of Wish House a few days later.

An orphanage . . .

But then her cell rings and her train of thought is immediately diverted onto her father's name flashing up on its screen.

"Hi . . . Daddy . . ." She'd never felt uncomfortable about calling him that until she'd moved north, because all the girls she knew back home did the same with their own fathers. Hannibal would inevitably call it *infantile*.

"I got your message. Are you alright? You said it was important—"

She's so thankful it's too early in the morning for him to be drunk yet. "I'm fine. I . . ."

She couldn't even begin to explain Mount Hikami to him. *I'm not crazy, not really. It was supernatural all along. And I'm married.* He'd be on his way up from Louisiana as soon as they got off the phone, panicked over her mental state. "I'm engaged," she says instead.

He pauses for an uncomfortably long time. "That's . . . it's sudden. Who is he? How long have y'all even known each other?"

"I met him at work about eighteen months ago. He was, uh, consulting, just like I do sometimes." As far as he's aware, she doesn't go into the field, her having assured him she'd never do it again after her extremely short, somewhat ill-advised time as a cop in New Orleans. (There are so many things he doesn't know that could *definitely* hurt him one day, and not just about her.) "He's a psychiatrist." (~~Lucas will get a kick out of that, the hypocritical little—~~)

"But you ain't never even brought him down here to introduce him to us!"

"We just been so busy with work—"

"Is this why you didn't come for Christmas last year?"

She can't mention that she and Hannibal haven't been involved for anywhere near that long, because that would make the whole thing just seem worse. "Nah, nah, ain't that at all—" She pauses, clears her throat. She always ends up slipping back into her natural accent when they talk. "It really was work. Not to mention I couldn't find anyone to watch the dogs and I can't afford to board them all."

"You coulda brought the dogs," he insists, but finally lets it drop, thank God. "So what's his name?"

"Hannibal Lecter."

"And what kinda name is that?"

She smirks a little despite herself. Well. It *rhymes*.

"Very . . . European," she says instead. "He's Lithuanian but he's lived all over."

"He ain't gonna move you away, is he? You're already far enough."

"No, Daddy."

"And y'all *are* plannin' to have the wedding in Dulvey or up in New Orleans, right?"

"Uh . . . We—no, *I* want to keep it small. Real simple. I don't want a lot of fuss about it—"

"You can have that here. Where better? The church is so small you couldn't invite too many."

Will cringes, mind flicking to tongues in Bibles and disemboweled corpses laid out on pews. "Hannibal's atheist."

"*Atheist*?" Daddy asks, scandalized.

"And we're hardly *devout*, Daddy. I seem to remember us only making it to mass on maybe Christmas Eve and Easter most years. And you and I both know Uncle Joe's out there doing voodoo in his swamp."

"I ain't involved in Joe's business, girl, but *this* I don't like."

"Is it too much to just be happy for me? Wasn't you the one who said you didn't think I'd ever get married at all?" He *had* been extremely drunk at the time, but she still can't help the bitter edge that creeps into her voice even after all these years. It's nothing she hadn't thought about herself, but it had still stung to hear it said out loud.

"Will . . ." At least he sounds a little regretful. "I *am* happy for you—Marguerite's gonna be thrilled—but I just *worry*—"

"He understands me. Better than anyone." It's maybe harsher than she intended, the unspoken *better than you ever did* that hangs there heavily in the silence between them, but she just purses her lips and lets it there.

". . . I really do want you to have it here," he finally says. "In a church."

She squeezes the bridge of her nose with her free hand, lets her fingers slip down to press into her closed eyes. "I'll talk to him about it. He might even like the idea of New Orleans. But I can't promise anything about . . . anything religious. And, uh, I can tell you he ain't gonna want Mama Marguerite to cater the reception."

Daddy just clears his throat at that, not about to disagree. They both know well enough that however enthusiastic she is about it—*bless her heart*—Marguerite's cooking is . . . *hit and miss*, to put it politely.

They manage to agree to leave it at that. Will tersely assures him she'll get back to him after she's talked to Hannibal, cutting short anything else with a mention of how she has to get to work.

She takes her glasses off and massages her temples after they hang up, staring blankly down at her half-finished plate. The dogs sniff around her feet, whining intermittently.

"Walk?" she asks them.

.

"Were they . . . bad?" she'd murmured that night as they'd laid in bed, Hannibal's arm around her waist and his breath hot on the back of her neck. If she'd stared into the darkness for long enough, if it was silent enough, she'd thought she could feel her body breaking down the

meat in her stomach, enzymes and acid ferrying it off to her cells. Forever making it a part of her and the child in her belly. “Bad like—like Mason Verger?”

Her questions had sounded naïve even to her own ears, pathetically so in a way she thought she’d shed in childhood. And Hannibal had hesitated for several breaths before he finally responded. “Very few people are as bad as Mason Verger.”

Now Will stares at the crime scene photos of those corpses splayed up on a classroom projector, nearly as large as life, and something like vertigo rises in her peripheral vision. The ground seems to twist beneath her feet and she can only keep standing thanks to the desk behind her, her hands in a death grip on it. Nausea that has nothing to do with the pregnancy really, truly, washes over her for the first time, her stomach confused, threatening to bring up something that’s already long gone.

She’s cold, and then she’s hot, and she feels like the fraud she is with the eyes of all these students on her.

“The Ripper has never gone on a spree before,” she says. She’s not sure how her voice comes out so steady. “Even during his sounders, there’s always been a few days’ cooling off period between each kill. What’s so different about this?”

She pulls her eyes away from the projector, turning to face them. Just because they’re all FBI-hopefuls brimming with ambition doesn’t mean they’re that different than the classes Will herself was a part of at college, often hesitant to raise their hands. And this is a particularly oblique question.

Finally, someone’s brave enough to offer a comment. “There are still sadistic elements, but he didn’t draw out the torture like he always has before.”

“Very good.”

Another hand tentatively raises. “Are we sure it’s even the same guy? The torture *is* really the signature of the Ripper as much as it’s the M.O. And the organ removal is inconsistent with the rest of them.”

She nods. “Definitely an interesting point, something you’d need to consider in the field. However, this *reeks* of experience. These victims were all quickly brought under control, one after the other in rapid succession—sometimes even multiples at once. They vanished with no witnesses, no struggle, and he had his tools and a place to do it already well selected in advance. This was . . . intricately mapped out.”

And in only a few weeks. But that would be nothing for him.

(If she closes her eyes right here, she would be able to feel what she’d Glanced from him—that first life he ever took, all those years ago, snaring him in a trajectory that would eventually lead straight to her.)

(All that blood sticky on his hands, the exhilaration in his veins. He was so, *so* young and for the first time in his life, he was *powerful*.)

(Walter Sullivan felt powerful the first time, too.)

(More than that.)

(*Satisfied*.)

“He also had a preselected place for the staging of the corpses, consistent with the Ripper’s previous crime scenes. And the organ removal shows the same evidence of prior surgical experience.”

She flicks to autopsy photos, using a laser pointer to idly circle the area where kidneys had been extracted from a thirty-one year old woman with exacting precision. The rest of the organs had been removed too, some combination of their severed connections causing the blood loss and shock that led to death, but they’d been unimportant in comparison, left slopped obscenely at her feet.

He only took the single best part from each one, no more.

The best *meat*. The rest was simply chaff, contemptuously discarded.

Less than pigs, all of them, worth nothing whole. But I’ll make them a part of something greater. This is my design.

(It should put her in a sick sweat, that being vivisected *minimized* the torture—that at least an artery was probably hit more quickly than usual, but not *too* fast, no, no. He’d only give her what was fresh, pulled from a body still pumping blood.)

“A sudden spree can be the sign of devolution. Bundy in Florida, for example. Does this scene indicate that?”

There’s a moment of silence, maybe consideration, but then one of the bright young cadets who always takes the front row answers. “No.”

There’s a hint of something Southern repressed even in that one little word—not the drawl, not the twang, maybe something more Appalachian.

It makes the corners of Will’s lips turn up in something like familiarity as she nods. “No. No, in this case, it seems like it doesn’t.”

(And somehow, she doesn’t think it did in Sullivan’s, either.)

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Beverly brings lunch to Will’s office, tapping the knuckles of her good hand against the doorjamb.

She sets the bag of food down with the other hand, which has graduated from a plaster cast to individual padded splints on each affected finger. Somehow Will feels a more immediate rush of guilt every time she looks at them than she does when she looks down at her own torso and *feels* what's become a part of her flesh and fat there, just as clearly as if she could see it.

(Beverly would hate her if she knew. Not just about Hannibal, no. She'd stay loyal through that, sit there and sympathize about the monster Will'd unknowingly hitched her star to, maybe even hug her. Maybe even conveniently ignore that Will really is a psychic, that she *knows* things without being told.

But it'd be too much, the realization of what Will willingly opened her mouth and ate.)

"I'm still doing bland," Beverly says, setting a disposable coffee shop cup firmly down in front of her. "Lemon balm tea. Kurosawa recommended it. And . . ." She pulls a salad bowl out of the bag, pops the top off. "Leafy greens with chicken and extra chopped-up hardboiled eggs. And your selection of dressing." She empties those out of a second little bag, alongside a set of plasticware, and proceeds to busy herself with her own burger and fries. They're appealingly greasy.

Will stares down at the little egg bits in the salad, thoughts briefly flicking to the homeopathic magical thinking Hannibal and everyone else should've grown out of in college. One organ to benefit another. A chicken egg for an ovum.

It doesn't taste too bad with the dressing, at least. "Thanks," she manages between bites.

"Wasn't anything," she says with a wave of her functional fingers. Somehow Will doesn't think tracking down "lemon balm" tea wouldn't be anything.

She eyes her skeptically over the top of her glasses, waiting for the other shoe to drop, but Beverly just dips two fries in ketchup and nods at the corkboard on the opposite wall. "I see Jack's given you a little light maternity work," she says wryly. "Can't let you get bored."

Will sips her tea, turning back to the pictures she's been staring at since class ended. The two new ones. "Someone might be recreating an old crime spree up in Maine."

"Hn. Doesn't really have a preferred victim type, does he? Is he recreating the original *exactly*?"

"Not from that standpoint. The only female victim then was an eight year old girl, not a middle aged woman. And he didn't drown anyone."

Sharon Blake, 46. Her head was still submerged in the waters of Toluca Lake when she was found, her fingers stiff with rigor, clawed into mud and silt. *13121* sits carved into her back, bloody and antemortem, exposed by a tear in her dress. No sexual assault—the rest of her clothes sit undisturbed save a matching maroon hat that fell off into the grass during a struggle.

Her clothes . . . something about them just strikes her as so *odd*. Will's well aware she doesn't understand fashion, but even Hannibal's never dressed her up like a 1950s housewife,

complete with hat.

But that's not the part that hits the hardest, that keeps her eyes on the photos of Blake's corpse rather than that of Peter Walls, 17, high school student. It's all about *location*.

Walls was found in an alley in Ashfield, but Blake . . . the file only states a ridiculously vague *woods immediately outside of Silent Hill*. But that phrasing was so familiar that she can't help but flip back through the files and realize that she's heard it twice before. *Wish House Orphanage, located at 9243 Old County Road, which runs through the forest surrounding Silent Hill*.

Beverly sighs, popping the fries into her mouth. She politely waits until she's chewed and swallowed to say, "Don't push yourself too hard this time."

"Eight more bodies will drop if he's really going for imitation. God forbid he's looking to outdo."

"And I'm sure you're doing your best. Just don't get . . . *lost* in it."

"I have a live in psychiatrist now. I don't think he'd let me." It's not to his benefit anymore.

(*Look at **me**, Will*. And she does. She does.)

"Good for him. And speaking of . . ." Something in Beverly's expression goes a little sly, and Will hears that other shoe hit the ground. "How go the preparations for the, uh, second wedding?"

Will nearly groans, resisting the urge to take off her glasses and rub her temples. "Well, my father wants it in a Catholic church in Louisiana."

"Worried God'll strike you down for crossing the threshold?"

"My father would say God's the one that made me this way." Hannibal, though . . . Hannibal would be smugly amused if God sent the church roof collapsing on them all just to spite him, because it would just prove him right. "Hannibal's . . . atheist."

"Still?" Beverly raises an eyebrow.

"I guess there's a difference between knowing there's some kind of supernatural element to the world and admitting in the existence of a higher being. He didn't even take the ghosts very well." They prove an afterlife, after all. A disturbing thought in terms of potential *repercussions*.

"Still . . . wherever you're going to have it . . . have you decided on anything else? Your dress? Flowers? Your maid of honor?"

She includes it very casually, but Will still nearly spits out her mouthful of tea in a startled laugh. *That's* what this has been leading up to?

“You. If you want to be.” Who else would she even ask? Alana, who’d sat there in wide eyed horror at the thought of the relationship, much less the marriage, spitting pity at Will and accusations at Hannibal? Abigail, who’ll only ever see the woman who killed her father and the man on the phone? Georgia, if she could be excused from the inpatient facility for a few hours?

Beverly acts like she hadn’t even hinted at it at all. “Really? I’d love to!”

They spend the rest of lunch discussing bridesmaid dresses.

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Will might be awake, but that’s very unclear. Her vision is very limited and the only thing that truly exists is the ceiling, sitting there cold and out of reach. Her arms stretch out for it, fingers grasping, nails trying to graze it, anything. But there it sits, beyond her. *Detached*.

(If only she could touch it, *go back to it,* if only, if *only*—)

Then a phone rings and Hannibal shifts in the bed next to her, groping a hand around the nightstand to answer it. “Hello?” he says, accent thicker with the remnants of sleep.

Something fades and snaps in her brain, and she’s left looking at her outstretched arms and greedy fingers with no idea of why they’re like that. Her muscles have strained to the point of pain, and all she can do is slowly lower them back to her chest.

“She’s asleep,” Hannibal’s saying, voice frosty. That can only mean it’s one person. Will doesn’t know what exactly happened between him and Jack in Japan, only that something of Hannibal’s mask has slipped, tiny aspects of the sadistic dislike seeping through. That dinner with Jack and Bella a couple of weeks ago was one of the most strained things Will’s ever seen.

“I’cn take it,” she mutters, tongue heavy in her mouth. Her hand flails out, and after a hesitation, Hannibal hands it over with less of a fight than he’d put up if he were entirely awake.

“Jack,” she all but whines, glancing at the alarm clock out of the corner of her eye. “It’s past three, couldn’t you—?”

“There’s been another one. Pack your bags, we’re going to Maine. Wheels up in two hours.”

Chapter End Notes

If you haven't played SH4, Will's new fetish for architecture will be explained eventually. Bizarrely.

It's probably obvious who Will's family is by this point, if you're familiar with that particular game.

Chapter title comes from "Glory and Gore" by Lorde.

Thank you so much for the kudos and comments!!! :)

tilt my sun towards your domain

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will hadn't entirely realized the extent of just how lost they are until she has to ask for directions in French. She and the nice gas station attendant with the heavy Canadian accent don't exactly communicate with perfectly mutual understanding, but enough so that the girl is able to trace out a route on Will's map of Maine back to the nearest town. She just shrugs when Will asks about Toluca County, then asks if she has a GPS on her phone.

"Mort," Will says, as is Jack's, and something must be wrong with the rental car because it won't charge either of them. They both must've spent more time on them during the flight to Portland than she'd realized, because they'd died only a little while after they'd set out on the road.

The gas station's not that different from one that would be on the stretch of road from Dulvey to New Orleans or Baton Rouge; run down, neglected, nearly decrepit in its way. The gas prices are too high and so is everything else, but she still looks over the dusty shelves, frowning at the aspirin and prepackaged foods. There's nothing here like some of the more modern, less rural places generally have—no coffee pots or fast food sitting out under heat lamps. Not that it matters, given her continuing reaction to coffee's smell and the fact she's still not hungry, Hannibal having dragged himself out of bed alongside her to make her breakfast before she left.

Sweet shouldn't be a word that applies to him, in any form or any circumstance, yet somehow, as she ate, she couldn't help but thinking it. Not that sweetness was actually what it boiled down to—rather, it's that Hannibal would find it terminally discourteous to roll over and go back to sleep while his pregnant wife readied herself for work.

So, with his hair down—though not ruffled—and with a silk housecoat thrown over his pajamas, he'd presented her with a veritable smorgasbord by the time she'd showered, dressed, and packed her go-bag. A variety of fruit, soft boiled eggs, toast, muffins, salmon on a bagel ("*lox*," he insists it's called), granola, and a special treat, considering how painstakingly he's been monitoring her diet—bacon, cut from the belly of the very snippy owner of a specialty store who grossly overcharged for his caviar.

She's struck by the surreal absurdity of her life as she gets back in the rental sedan, though it tapers off as quickly as it came in favor of her wondering if Hannibal would make her Eggs Sardou if she asked politely. Idly, she watches in the rearview as Jack finishes fueling up and runs into the store to hand over some bills to the clueless little French-Canadian cashier.

When he gets back in the driver's seat, Will points out the spot on the map to him the girl'd indicated, as vague as it is. Then she spends the first half hour back on the road messing with her phone, trying anything and everything to get it back on. It's been continuously plugged in for a while, but the screen stays black.

It pisses her off, because a little while after they'd gotten back from Japan, Hannibal had *insisted* on replacing her old phone with the newest, most sophisticated, top-of-the-line model out there. Egregiously expensive, of course, to the point she'd been reluctant to even accept it.

Surely the damn thing should've had a longer battery life in the first place, at *that* price.

"You okay, Will?" comes Jack's voice, all of a sudden.

"Yeah. Just, I promised Hannibal I'd text him when we landed."

Jack's shoulders go slightly stiffer. A muscle in his jaw twitches. She's familiar with it all, given it always tends to happen now when Hannibal's brought up.

"He always like to keep track of you like that?" he asks, and can't quite manage to keep his voice pitched to the purely casual.

Under any kind of ordinary circumstances—off in some other reality—she'd likely have been offended by his crystal clear insinuation. She'd have done however many mental gymnastics required to explain away all the imbalances in power, and the clear malpractice at play. Infatuation can cloud a mind enough to justify *anything*.

But she's not angry at Jack. He's not at all *wrong*. There are so many ways Hannibal would try to subtly exert control over her if she wasn't already aware of the game he's playing. Her knowledge, her insight, is the only thing keeping him from dominating her completely.

Still, in lieu of anger, there is some definite irritation. "You've never asked Bella to check in with you after a flight?"

"Of course I have," he concedes. Though he can't help but add, his voice low enough to imply he doesn't want her to really hear it, yet just loud enough it seems he doesn't actually care if she *does*: "Though I was never her doctor."

Will pinches the bridge of her nose and huffs back a tired exhale of air. "I'm not your child, Jack. I'm not your teacup. I'm not even officially your *employee*."

"Can you blame me, Will?" he asks earnestly, taking his eyes off the road for a second to glance over at her. "Really? Your mental health was supposed to be his one and only concern —"

"Except no psychiatrist could've ever been equipped to handle it. That was made pretty goddamn clear on Hikami. And nothing—nothing *inappropriate* happened before then, Jack."

It's the truth in the sense that nothing sexual had happened, which is what he's primarily focused on. (It's the most salacious aspect, as far as he knows.) But in every other way? She'd have one hell of a malpractice suit on her hands if she was so inclined to pursue it.

Jack's not the only one to voice these kinds of sentiments, though. Not even the most vehement. Alana had sat there on Hannibal's expensive leather couch, her gaze alternating

between appalled when it rested on the engagement ring on Will's hand and sickened when it moved to Hannibal.

"I *recommended* you," she'd hissed at him, betrayal curling around each of her words like razor wire. "I *referenced* you to the FBI. She's your *patient*, how could you do this?!"

Alana, so ethical. She's a good woman and a decent psychiatrist, but nowhere near skilled enough to see the reality of what's happening around her.

"He's not my psychiatrist anymore," Will adds. "Not since we got back to the US."

"You have a new one set up yet?"

She grits her teeth a little. "As I said, given my . . . condition, they're not likely to help, but yes, I've got an appointment with a Dr. du Maurier. If we get back by the end of the week, I can actually keep it. Hannibal says she's excellent."

(But Alana had said Hannibal was excellent. Distrust unfurls one layer at a time from Jack's mind and even though Will's largely at peace in the place she's arrived at, there's still some part that takes a petty little pleasure in it.

Jesus Christ, Alana, you're a psychiatrist*. You're better educated than I'll ever be, but you've never even* suspected? *Never had a single hint? The person suit has never once faltered in all the years you've known him?*)

(Even *Chilton* had looked askew at Hannibal the last time he was at dinner and Hannibal had made that joke involving ladyfingers.)

Jack goes silent for a while. Will takes the opportunity to open the file about the most recent victim across her lap. In the twenty or so minutes she studies it, he squints at the map, trying to determine about when their next turn is coming up.

Toby Archbolt. A middle-aged black male, native to Silent Hill. His death never would've been connected to the others, though, if not for the numbers that had been carved into his skin as he laid there dying at the bottom of a cliff—14121.

"Why do you think he followed the vic all the way to Mexico?" Jack asks.

"Someone was very determined," she mutters. "The others could've conceivably been random, but not this one."

"*Do* you think the others were random?"

"No." The answer comes immediately, with no conscious thought, but it has a rock-solid foundation. "He chose them all. Carefully. Like—like picking works of art for a gallery." No, that doesn't settle quite right. "Or maybe more like . . . moving parts for a machine."

(There's this gnawing feeling of . . . forward motion. *Progress*.)

Archbolt's background is described in glowing terms: a member of the city council, his seat gained through his reputation as a philanthropist and entrepreneur, as well known for his support of local charities and churches and hospitals as he had been for his sightseeing business. A pamphlet for it had been stuck haphazardly into the file, and she browses it, curious about what all there could actually be to see.

Nothing strikes her as particularly overwhelming, at least in the context of a dedicated tourist spot. From the little inset map, Toluca Lake is fairly large—nowhere near the scale of Lake Pontchartrain, but the coastline doesn't just run the expanse of Silent Hill; it stretches along eastward, all the way over to a neighboring town, Shepherd's Glen.

She imagines she could waste a good few days away in the water, fishing in a little boat and appreciating the solitude, but most everyone else she knows would find it unrelentingly dull. She can't quite imagine the likes of Hannibal or Beverly being overly enthralled with the Devil's Pit, either—another of the town's natural wonders, a gorge stretching so far down into the earth that apparently two Empire State Buildings stacked on top of each other wouldn't even reach the top.

Aside from that, the only things highlighted are the Lakeside Amusement Park, a vaguely defined 'resort area' comprised of some restaurants and bars, and the chance to see some quaint houses. The names and numbers of various hotels and motels are listed on the flipside, though on the original copy, before it was scanned and emailed to the FBI, a pen line had been struck through *The Lakeview Hotel*.

Silent Hill will move you and fill you with a feeling of deep peace, the brochure reads in conclusion. *We hope your time here will be pleasant and your memories will last forever.*

Will's eye twitches. She doesn't notice.

Her gaze flicks back to the file, continuing along the list of Archbolt's lifely achievements, as laid out by his official biography off the Silent Hill City Council's website, when her eye catches on three words like a fish on a hook. *Wish House Orphanage*.

Partnered with the Silent Hill Smile Support Society (4S) to reopen Wish House Orphanage, in order to provide care for Toluca County's at-risk and disadvantaged children.

"Does anything say where Sullivan grew up? I heard it mentioned he was orphaned. At what point in his childhood was that?"

Jack shrugs. "I haven't seen anything about it. The LEOs didn't provide many personal details on him at the time. Though from what I've seen of his interviews, he wasn't offering them up."

Will had already had more than an inkling, but this just confirms it. Somehow, everything begins with Wish House.

.

By the time the headlights finally hit a reflective green road sign informing them that they're twenty miles from Brahms, it's dusk and Will's eyelids are heavy. Even then, she's aware enough to drift off on a pleasant wave of relief, as according to the map, Brahms is only about thirty miles away from Silent Hill. After groping their way blindly around Maine's backroads all day, they're finally pointed in the right direction.

Her sleep is deep and void black, whispering across her mind like the slide of Hannibal's silk sheets over her bare skin. But gradually—so very slowly it's like she's one of Lucas's frogs on a hotplate, unable to sense the steady rising temperature—it shrinks down around her. It *pulsates*. Sound distorts, stretched and muffled through the rush of blood and fluid and rhythmic heartbeats.

Her own mind has sunk down into her child's, into that collection of expanding cells whining and craving for one thing, the womb.

(The confinement. The comfort. The safety. The love.)

(The *peace*.)

Then the pleasant warmth grows hot, and there's something pushing down, *intruding*. So Will opens her eyes.

They meet the green of Walter Sullivan's.

(The very center of them, around his pupils, run into amber then to brown, now that she sees them up close. She's not sure why that detail strikes her so intensely, and so immediately.)

"Beautiful," he coos, stroking her belly. The car door's open and he's curled awkwardly around her legs, his own spilling out onto the pavement. "There's nothing more beautiful—more *sacred* than a mother."

There's dried blood spatter across his face and rusting in the oily strands of his hair, but his neck is intact.

The radio hadn't been working before. They'd thought the car had some kind of complete electrical failure in that part of the console, given neither the USB nor the cigarette lighter would even charge their phones. But now the radio's alive and *screeching*, static blaring loud enough to nearly deafen her. The sound makes her teeth hurt deep down in their sockets, every individual root pulsing and contracting.

"Walter," she manages to finally choke out. She can't tell if she's dreaming or awake but what she *does* know, down in the marrow of her bones, that he's real. Just as real as Hobbs had proven to be.

He smiles with yellowed teeth, hand still pawing at her womb. And it gushes into her brain like thick blood from an aneurysm—a mother, yes, he *desperately* wants a mother, but more

than that, he wants a *womb*. Not Will's, though—a *particular* womb with sturdy walls that kept the rotting filth of the outside world at bay.

A secure room that didn't smell of musty water and rust, where no one was watching, where he'd never be beaten or forced to swallow water with leaches that squirmed down the interior of his throat and swam into his stomach—

Will vomits. The world grays out as she does, reduced to the spasming of her digestive muscles. The remains of Hannibal's elaborate breakfast hit concrete, and she realizes she's out of the car, nails and knees digging into unforgiving pavement.

"Will?" comes Jack's concerned voice.

The radio's static has gone abruptly silent, so she can follow the sound and catch him in the corner of her eye as he approaches. The distinctly thick, oily smell of gasoline hits her next, prompting another wave of heaving, even as she realizes the reason it's hanging in the air is because they've stopped at another station.

A big hand falls between her shoulder blades, rubbing awkwardly. "Morning sickness?" he asks.

"No." She swallows heavily, taking deep breaths through her mouth as she tries not to smell, all the while willing her stomach under control.

Finally, when she's pretty sure a whole sentence can be managed without setting off a new round, she says, "I saw him."

"Him?" He has to pause as he helps her to her feet. She manages to balance with her hand pressing hard on the side of the car. "Who?"

"Sullivan. He was here. He came to me, just like Hobbs."

Jack looks pained. Uncomfortable. "*Will* . . ."

"I know what he wants!"

"*Wanted*. He's *dead*, Will."

"I know! I'm perfectly aware of that, Jack! But—b-but I always knew this whole thing was intensely personal, and it is. It's about his mother. That's what it boils down to."

"His mother? What, like Ed Gein? *Norman Bates*?"

"No. He doesn't want to be her best friend. He doesn't want to—to preserve a shrine to her off in a bedroom somewhere. He wants to go—" Back. "He wants her *womb*."

Jack makes a face.

"The womb is a refuge, Jack." Her hand wanders down to her lower abdomen of its own accord, pressing warm and soothing and defensive over her baby. "Soft, safe, inky blackness.

Nothingness. None of the . . . the pain possible outside it. He was an orphan. I don't think—I *know* he didn't have an easy childhood."

Jack turns away from her with a huff, but she can tell he's thinking about it. "I can see your line of reasoning," he finally says. "But how would going on a murder spree accomplish that?"

"We both know delusions frequently have no root in reality. Plenty of people have killed for reasons just as bizarre, just as nonsensical."

He nods sharply. "Yes. But why would a copycat take up his mission?"

She can only shake her head and rub her temples. Her glasses have somehow gone askew, so she straightens them. "Wish House Orphanage."

"What?"

"It comes up again and again. It's no coincidence. I'd bet money that Sullivan was raised there, and there are so many lines leading back, both with this set and the previous one."

His shoulders slump a little, and he sucks in a slow breath, eyes darting around before they finally try to meet hers. She keeps the rim of her glasses between them. "We'll look into it as soon as we can."

It's the best she's going to get, so she gives a jerky nod. He steps around the puddle of vomit to grab the nozzle out of the pump, while she ducks back into the passenger seat to get out of his way.

The radio's playing now. No static, just something at a low volume that's so upbeat, it makes the interior of the car seem nearly surreal, its own little enclosed pocket of existence floating through the pitch-black Maine night. *If I'd never met you*, a woman croons, *I'd be fine on my own, baby.*

Both Will's phone and Jack's, still plugged into the USB and cigarette lighter, respectively, have lit screens, though they're identical—that image of a battery in the red that indicates it's charging, but going to take a while to come to life.

She swallows thickly and wishes she had a water bottle to wash down the taste of her own stomach acid. Eyes shut tight, she falls fully back into the passenger seat. She tries to listen to the sound of her own breathing to drown out the residual ringing in her ears.

Unfortunately, it can't cover Jack opening the driver's side door and sliding into the seat. Yet the slide of metal into metal she'd been expecting as he starts the ignition doesn't come.

"Did you . . . do that, Will?" he asks in its place.

Will's eyes flutter open. Previously, she'd been distracted with the phones, so it's only now she's paying any attention at all to the windshield.

"No," she says simply.

The symbol drawn in the fog seems . . . mathematically centered. In fact, everything about it is carefully, meticulously done—two perfect, concentric circles, then three more singular circles inside of them.

Four symbols just outside the whole of the thing are placed at the north, south, east, and west around it, and in the interior, a myriad of other marks fill the center between the main circles and any space in the center not taken up by the other three. Some seem like they might be lettering from some obscure alphabet, while others clearly stand alone. Some have smooth flowing lines, while others have violent edges.

An eye stares down at them from the top, drawn especially brutally with bold strokes, and the only imperfection in the entire thing is lines radiating out from the three inner circles, cutting crudely through the rest of the sigil to the outside.

It's incredibly detailed. Incredibly intricate. Ridiculously well done, practice and skill in every stroke used to create it, despite such a sloppy medium. She can only imagine how long it would've taken to memorize each individual part of the whole.

It's also on the *inside* of the windshield. That's where fog collects.

Why ruin it? she asks herself. *Why those three lines?*

The answer is immediate.

The sun. The sun pierces all.

And fire cleanses.

Chapter End Notes

Silent Hill always struck me as a really lame tourist spot, even without the hell dimensions. Though, I am including canon from all the games, not just the original four, thus the appearance of the oh-so fascinating giant pit from "Downpour".

The victim who Hannibal made into bacon is a reference to a minor character in one of my favorite Frasier episodes of all time, "Roe to Perdition."

I like Chilton now because I've discovered Rafael Barba on SVU.

I find Walter following a guy all the way to Mexico to kill him when he could've just waited for him to come back to Silent Hill really funny for some reason.

The quote from the pamphlet is taken directly from an in-game file, and the song playing on the radio is "You're Not Here" from SH3.

The chapter title is from the song "December" by Collective Soul.

Thanks so much for the kudos and comments and sorry about the wait!!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!